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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 154 OCTOBER 7TH, 1942

DEAR MEMBER,

A significant landmark in the movement of co-operation between the Churches, an account of which was given not long ago in a Supplement (C.N-L. No. 136), is the inauguration a fortnight ago of the British Council of Churches.

THE BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The new Council met for the first time last month for two days, under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Canterbury. To those who have observed the movement at close quarters in recent years, the advance in mutual understanding and confidence is remarkable. The whole-heartedness of the Churches in the matter is something new. They have given proof of it by the choice of outstanding leaders as their representatives and by the readiness of these to give generously the time that the work of the new Council demands.

The Council of Churches has inherited a wide range of activities from the pre-existing organs of inter-Church co-operation which it amalgamates. Two of its departments deal respectively with social responsibility and with international friendship. Among the subjects receiving close attention are family life and rural reconstruction. The study of these is being carried out in direct relation to concrete realities and to what is happening in spheres outside the Church, and reports of high value may be expected in due course. The main practical activities of the Council are in connection with work for youth and the Religion and Life movement, for each of which a whole-time secretary has been appointed in recent months. In regard to the latter movement the attitude of the Council is alert and critical. It is alive to great opportunities, and at the same time fully aware of the many problems for which a solution has yet to be found. By incorporating the British section of the World Conference on Faith and Order, the Council has recognized the importance of the issue of the reunion of the Churches.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The British Council of Churches is the link between the Churches in Great Britain and the World Council of Churches, to which, in spite of the war, a great number of the leading communions in different countries have already given their adhesion. The necessary foundations have been laid, and the World Council of Churches is ready to spring into action as soon as the war is over. It is actively functioning, even in war-time, through its offices in London, Geneva and New York. From the Geneva office contacts are maintained with the Churches on the continent of Europe, and extensive help is being given to prisoners of war and refugees. The international study of questions relating to the life of the Church and to post-war reconstruction is being steadily pursued. Personal contacts have been maintained by the visits of Church leaders to other countries, such as that of the Bishop of Chichester to Sweden, and of the secretaries of the Council, i.e. of Dr. Visser 't Hooft and Dr. H. S. Leiper to this country, and of Dr. Paton to the United States.[1]

[1] M. Marc Boegner, in the letter to Marshal Pétain quoted in last week's News-Letter, explained that apart from the representations he was making on behalf of the Protestant Churches in France, he was also the Chairman of the Administrative Committee of the World Council of Churches and could assure the Marshal that deep emotion had been awakened in the Churches of other countries by the treatment of the Jews in France.

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Encouraging as this is, it is not the whole of the story. The British Council of Churches will be reinforced by an auxiliary Christian undertaking under lay direction and concerned with Christian action in the spheres of secular life. This auxiliary effort will be free from ecclesiastical control, but is set up with the cordial approval of the Council of Churches and will work in close liaison with it. An account of this new experiment is given in this week's Supplement by Sir Walter Moberly. To achieve its purpose it will need a larger staff and greater resources than it has at present, and a further statement about this will be made before long.

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Very few readers would notice, unless their attention was specially called to it, the substitution in this issue, in the line in tiny print at the bottom of this page, of the name of the Christian Frontier for that of the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life (now absorbed in the British Council), which has appeared in every previous issue of the News-Letter.

The change does not mean that the Council of the Christian Frontier is directly responsible for opinions expressed in the News-Letter, any more than was the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life, but only that the new Council accepts financial responsibility for the publication, has power to bring the News-Letter to an end, can dismiss the editor, and appoint and dismiss the advisory editorial board.

Nor does the change mean that the Christian News-Letter becomes the organ of the Christian Frontier in the sense that its appeal will be only to those interested in the activities of the latter. It will in the future, as in the past, try to keep within its purview the whole field of Christian effort and, so far as is possible in the limited space, to reflect what is best in Christian thought and action. The new gain to the News-Letter is that, in addition to the close liaison which will be maintained with the Council of Churches, it will be able to draw on wider ranges of experience with which the activities of the Frontier will bring it into contact.

Taken as a whole, the set-up that has been described, with its remarkable combination of official co-operation and liberty of experiment, of authority and freedom, makes it evident that in respect of organization the Christian cause in Great Britain could hardly be better served. What matters in the future is the quality of life which flows through these channels.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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